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United Nations Institute for Training and Research

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 57/268 of 20 December 2002 on the United Nations Institute for Training and Research. The report provides an overview of the programmes of the Institute; discusses strengthening cooperation with other United Nations institutes and relevant national, regional and international institutes; and assesses the development of partnerships and the financial situation of the Institute. The General Fund of the Institute, which depends on voluntary contributions, remains weak and continues to be a cause for concern. It is hoped that Member States will resume or increase their contributions to the General Fund in order to guarantee continued activity of the Institute.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 57/268 of 20 December 2002 on the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). The principal issues addressed in resolution 57/268 are the further strengthening of cooperation with other United Nations institutes and relevant national, regional and international institutes; the building of partnerships between the Institute and organizations and bodies of the United Nations system with respect to their training programmes and the need to develop further and to expand the scope of those partnerships, in particular at the country level; and the financial situation of the Institute.

II. An overview of the activities of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research

2. The volume of services delivered by UNITAR over the period under review has remained stable, namely, some 130 seminars, workshops and meetings, benefiting close to 6,000 participants from all continents. The proportion of capacity-building projects has been increasing steadily in relation to actual training activities. In practice, this implies an increased focus on specific issues pertaining to the strengthening of institutional structures and may indicate that priority is sometimes given to particular countries or regions, especially least developed countries, Sub-Saharan Africa and countries with economies in transition in Central Asia.

3. The two main domains of action remain unaltered: management of international affairs and economic and social development. The first includes training for diplomats accredited to the United Nations, training programmes specially designed in response to requests from Member States and fellowships, that is, annual courses on similar subject matter, including international law, environmental law, negotiation and peacekeeping and preventive diplomacy. Activities related to economic and social development deal with, for instance, several specific and technical issues of environmental and natural resource management, legal aspects of debt management, international trade and matters related to the World Trade Organization. Courses on economic and social development are designed for civil servants of developing countries and countries with economies in transition working in concerned ministries and public authorities.

4. Evaluations are carried out regularly to ensure that UNITAR programmes meet well-defined training and capacity-building needs. By way of example, the specially designed programmes on the management of international affairs are being requested increasingly by Member States, while the activities related to decentralized cooperation have been extended to Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. Cooperative centres are being established progressively. Training in the use of information and communication technology is meeting with growing interest in view of the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003 and in Tunis in 2005. The requests by Member States to UNITAR for the provision of services in the above fields far exceed the Institute's capacity, in terms of both human and material means, and thus cannot always be met with a positive response.

III. Strengthening cooperation with other United Nations institutes and relevant national, regional and international institutes

5. Following a pilot phase of two years and in view of the positive results obtained, the Board of Trustees of UNITAR, at its forty-first session, held in Geneva from 29 April to 1 May 2003, confirmed the opening of the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Hiroshima, Japan. The Office was officially opened on 15 July 2003. The Government of Hiroshima Prefecture has committed funds and facilities to UNITAR for an initial period of three years, from 15 July 2003 to 14 July 2006. A work programme has been established to meet the training and capacity-building needs of the countries in the region identified during the pilot phase. The programmes will include training in post-conflict reconstruction, application of environmental legal instruments, sea and human security and international economics and finance for development.

6. At the request of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and in cooperation with it, UNITAR launched the AIDS Competence Programme in January 2003. The aim of the joint venture is to develop the capacity of communities and organizations to respond to the challenge of the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) by sharing approaches and lessons learned. Working with in-country United Nations colleagues and partner organizations such as the Salvation Army African Regional Programme Facilitation Team for HIV/AIDS, Health and Development and the AIDS Education Programme at Chiang Mai University, Thailand, the Programme takes a general approach, which includes facilitation, self-assessment, connecting people, networking on online workspace and building a knowledge base.

7. Another positive development was the launching at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August to 4 September 2002,[1] of a partnership with the International Labour Organization and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, two bilateral donors, the Netherlands and Switzerland, and the International Council of Chemical Associations to develop a capacity-building programme for the implementation of a globally harmonized system for chemical classification and labelling. The initiative was submitted to the World Summit. The goal of the partnership is to strengthen capacity at all levels and sectors, in particular in developing countries, to ensure a higher standard of chemical labelling and related precautionary measures for industrial and agricultural chemicals, chemicals in transport and consumer chemicals. Dangerous chemicals traded internationally and produced locally are to be classified appropriately and labelled in accordance with the globally harmonized system by the year 2008. In the medium- and long-term, the partnership is expected to lead to a decrease in environmental and human health-related effects attributable to the use of hazardous chemicals.

8. The training programme on the legal aspects of debt and financial management has been expanding steadily. While it has been active for some years in English-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa, it has now been extended to French-speaking Africa, at the request of Pole-Dette, a body established by two associations of central banks, the Banque des États de l'Afrique centrale and the Banque centrale des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest. UNITAR has also been selected by the Government of Viet

Nam to conduct training courses for its personnel with a broad programme of financial management. The courses will be conducted jointly by the United Nations Development Programme and the Ministry of Finance of Viet Nam. The regional public debt management project of the International Monetary Fund in Central Asia includes training components to be implemented by UNITAR and consideration is being given to a programme to be organized jointly by UNITAR, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The programme is intended for civil servants from the ministries of finance, foreign affairs and justice of the Central Asian republics and Azerbaijan.

9. During the World Summit on Sustainable Development, UNITAR proposed a "type 2" partnership on sustainable urbanization. Several United Nations bodies, in particular the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, local authorities from industrialized and developing countries, non-governmental organizations and private companies, have joined the partnership. Regional programmes have been launched, based on UNITAR associated centres in Curitiba, Brazil, for Latin America and the Caribbean, Kuala Lumpur, for Asia and the Pacific, Lyons, France, for Europe and Ouagadougou for Africa. Other associated centres are being established in other parts of the world. The programmes are expected to facilitate urban management, in particular by providing for such essential needs as water management, collection and disposal of waste, public transportation and social housing.

10. Similarly, in view of the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society, UNITAR is organizing regional pre-summit meetings on the role and responsibilities of local authorities in the information society. Regional conferences are being held in Brazil, China, France, Mauritania and Spain in order to facilitate the participation of developing countries in the World Summit. Specific proposals for action will be submitted to the World Summit. Several entities of the United Nations system, in particular the Department for Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and the International Telecommunication Union, local and municipal governments, non-governmental organizations and private companies have been invited to join the partnership. Overall, the recent programmatic developments of UNITAR are encouraging and seem full of potential.

IV. Building partnerships

11. Almost all UNITAR programmes are conducted in cooperation with one or more intergovernmental organizations, national development agencies, non-governmental organizations, academia, local authorities or private corporations. Such cooperation has been the main feature of UNITAR activities over the past decade and has been gaining ground as programmes develop. Most entities of the United Nations system are regularly called upon to cooperate in the framework of specific projects.

12. The most significant development during the period under review has been the advancement of cooperation with the private sector. The World Summit on Sustainable Development and the preparation of the World Summit on the Information Society have provided opportunities to obtain intellectual and material support from important private corporations, such as Veolia Environnement and the Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations (France), British Petroleum and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Intel Corporation (United States

of America). In addition, the International Council of Chemical Associations has expressed interest in a partnership with UNITAR and other concerned United Nations entities for a programme on the management of chemicals. All these partnerships are established without conditions and within the framework of the Global Compact and the United Nations Millennium Declaration (General Assembly resolution 55/2).

13. Together with the secretariat of the Global Compact, UNITAR has initiated a dialogue with the private sector on how better to mobilize the good will of companies adhering to the Global Compact in favour of training and capacity-building in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. A series of meetings are being held with chief executive officers of several leading companies.

14. Cooperation has been expanding and the design and organization of training and capacity-building programmes has been developing since the World Summit on Sustainable Development. That cooperation, between local governments and municipalities, is of a decentralized nature, which represents an emerging trend in international cooperation. Thanks to its institutional autonomy and operational flexibility, UNITAR has an important role to play in this area.

15. In brief, given its specific mandate, UNITAR stresses the cooperative approach in all its activities, especially with regard to its work with other international organizations. Such cooperation is being gradually expanded to include other partnerships in particular with private enterprises, in the spirit of the Global Compact. That approach is also reflected in one of the key principles of the Institute's programmes, that countries should take a multi-stakeholder approach to issues. Future areas of UNITAR activities will include further work in fostering strengthened sustainability with countries receiving training; exploring electronic means of providing training and capacity-building assistance; and a greater emphasis on assisting States wishing to meet their obligations under international agreements.

V. Research on training

16. Research on and for training and capacity-building is continuing. New approaches are being identified and training material developed. Two important issues in that context are the methodology for creating and sharing knowledge and an in-depth examination of online learning systems and methods.

17. UNITAR is now offering online learning courses alongside its traditional in-country training, fellowships, seminars and conferences in the field of social and economic development. Through a range of online learning courses, UNITAR thus hopes to offer a new dynamic to its training mandate through the use of new information technologies with a view to reaching a wider audience and allowing a flexible and user-friendly approach. UNITAR also hopes to share its experience with other organizations and institutions, especially from developing countries, through continuous and systematic electronic contact, and to benefit from the online training approaches and methodologies already developed and deployed by universities and regional training institutions worldwide. The UNITAR training programme in the legal aspects of debt, financial management and negotiation is the first stage in the development of UNITAR's "e-Learning" portal and online course initiative.

18. In countries seen to be making progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS, individuals, families and communities themselves drive the response to the disease. However, in countries relying mainly on the provision of information and commodities such as drugs and contraceptives, the virus continues to spread and infect greater numbers of people. Convinced that the key learning approach consists of connecting those who are making progress and have something to share with those who want to learn, UNITAR and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS have launched an innovative programme of facilitation through the adoption of knowledge management approaches to help create and share knowledge.

VI. Long-term financial viability of the Institute, its debt and rental and maintenance costs

19. While the financial situation of the programmes funded through special purpose grants is satisfactory, the General Fund of UNITAR, made up of non-earmarked voluntary contributions, remains weak and vulnerable, notwithstanding the reiterated calls and appeals of the General Assembly. This is a matter for some concern. Member States, in particular industrialized countries, should consider resuming their voluntary contributions to the General Fund, which would enable UNITAR to continue conducting its training programmes for diplomats and other national civil servants accredited to the United Nations, allowing some flexibility in meeting the most immediate needs and ensuring a minimum of operational continuity.

20. In addition, the Secretariat and UNITAR have been considering ways and means to solve the long-standing issue of rental and maintenance costs of the premises used in Geneva and New York and the payment of the accumulated debt of the Institute to the United Nations. A separate report will be submitted to the General Assembly in that regard pursuant to section V of Assembly resolution 57/292 of 20 December 2002.

VII. Conclusion

21. The Secretary-General has followed with attention recent developments in the programmes of UNITAR, because of the relevance and importance of training and capacity-building for peace and security and economic and social development. Tribute should be paid to the 20 members of the Board of Trustees and to the Executive Director of the Institute for their excellent work.

Notes

[1] *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1) and corrigendum.